

NARRATIVE

OF THE GREAT

FLOOD

IN THE

Jacobus Agnus.
Rivers Tyne, Tease, Wear, &c.

ON

The 16th and 17th of Nov. 1771.

Collected from the most authentic Papers yet published.

WITH

An Account of the Eruption of
Solway Moss.

*The Rev Isaac Farrow Curate of Egglestone
preached a Sermon on the occasion of this
Great Flood. therefore this account & it
is probably wrote by him, as it was
sewed together with the said Sermon.*

NEWCASTLE:

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ON Sunday morning the 17th of November the inhabitants of Newcastle upon Tyne were alarmed with the most dreadful inundation that ever befel that part of the country; occasioned, as may be presumed, by an incessant fall of rain from Saturday morning to Sunday, which was

particularly violent in the western parts of that county and the county of Durham. The first dawn of day discovered a scene of horror and devastation, too dreadful for words to express, or Humanity to behold without shuddering: All the cellars, warehouses, shops, and lower apartments of the dwelling-houses from the West end of the Close to near Ewes-burn were totally under water. The flood was so rapid and sudden, that it was with the greatest difficulty the inhabitants, who slept in the lower parts of their houses, escaped with their lives. The middle arch of Tyne Bridge, and two other arches near to the South side of the water, were carried away, and seven houses with shops standing thereon, together with some of the inhabitants, overwhelmed in immediate destruction. Mr Fiddas and his maid, Mr Tinkler, Mr Chr. Byerley and his son, together with an apprentice to Mr James, are the persons that have perished by the falling of these arches: and the houses and shops which fell into the river that morning were occupied by Mr Paton, Mr W. Hills, Mr Byerly, Mrs Hawwell, Mr Tinkler, Mr Edw. Wilson, and Mr John James. Four other houses with shops likewise fell from the bridge the next day into the river; and in a little time after, the whole range of buildings, from near the Blue Stone on the Bridge unto Gatehead, met with the same fate. Mr Paton's house was carried wholly as far as Jarrow's lake, seven or eight miles down the river, where it was stopped, but upon examining the inside, nothing was left in it but a cat and a dog, both alive.—The water was supposed to be at its height about seven o'clock in the morning, and to have risen upwards of twelve feet above high water mark in spring-tides.—The Sandhill was a capacious flood; and boats plied thereon some hours. In some parts it was six feet deep. All the timber, merchants' goods, &c. lying upon the Quay and on the several floors in the neighbourhood, were entirely swept away by the current; as were most of the ships lying at the Quay, and a number of keels, boats, and other small craft



craft both below and above bridge, carried down the current, and scattered and stranded on each side of the river to Shields, or otherwise borne onward into the sea, and there sunk or wrecked along the coast. Three sloops and a brig were driven upon the Keyside, and left there when the flood abated: they furrowed up the pavement, and broke down a great part of the Quay.

But Newcastle did not alone suffer from the terrible violence of this flood: Hardly a village or cottage-house from Tyne-head, in Alston-moor, to Shields, escaped its destructive fury: The bridges at Alston, Ridley-hall, Haydon, Chollerford, and Hexham, were all carried away: the wooden bridge at Allendale was swept away entire, and discovered the next day lying across a lane near Newbrough, as exactly as if fixed there by human means. It is impossible to ascertain the prodigious number of horses, black cattle, sheep and other animals that have perished, and of corn and hay stacks, hedges, fences, implements of husbandry, and whole acres of ground, which have been swept away by the impetuosity of the torrent, whereby families who have lived in affluence and plenty are now reduced to the most abject misery and want. In scenes of general calamity, the distresses of individuals are seldom remarked: Those from whose rack'd heart every comfort is torn, Humanity may soften, though she cannot remove their grief. The inhabitants of the village of Bywell were among the most unhappy sufferers in this melancholy catastrophe: The whole town was under water; and in the dining-room, and other rooms on the first floor of Mr Fenwick's house, it was six feet deep. The farmers there have lost all their corn and hay stacks, cows, &c. All the garden walls belonging to Mr Fenwick are broken down, and the gardens entirely destroyed: A delay of five minutes would have effected destruction to his whole stud, together with four servants.——Four dwelling-houses were swept away, and one whole family, together with four other persons perished: many people were taken out of their houses through the roofs, &c. The shrieks of women and of children, frantic with all the agonies of despair, will better be conceived than described: Dead bodies and coffins were torn out of the church-yards, and the living and the dead promiscuously clashed in the torrent. Mr Fenwick's humanity on this occasion, by sending the unhappy sufferers a most seasonable relief, merited the high-

est encomium.—The boat-house at Ovingham was carried away, and eight persons perished: When the water entered the house, there were ten people in it, the boatman, his wife, and two children, his mother and his brother, his man and maid-servants, with a young man from Prudhoe, and one Geo. Simpson, a labouring man; on their perceiving the danger they were in, they all went up stairs, and as the water advanced, they ascended nearer the roof of the house, 'till at last they were obliged to get upon the top of the house, when three of them climbed up to the chimney top, viz. George Simpson, the young man from Prudhoe, and the boatman's brother; these three soon after saw all the others swept away from the roof, and did not remain long after them, until they shared the same fate. The boatman and the maid were taken from a tree about eleven o'clock on the Sunday forenoon, about 2 or 300 yards from the house, but the girl died in ten minutes after; the boatman's brother had also clung to another tree, and was saved at the same time. These two are the only survivors of the ten persons.

By the violence of the flood several ships were driven from their moorings at Shields upon the Herd, &c.

At Team, near Swalwell, a boat was driven against a house almost under water, of which the people immediately laid hold, and thereby saved the whole family, with some others who would have certainly perished.—A woman with a child in her arms were found drowned in Jarrow's lake.

At Haydon, it overflowed the whole town, which obliged the men with women and children upon their backs, to wade almost up to their necks to the church, where they found sanctuary; when the Rev. Mr. Harrison behaved with the greatest humanity, by getting them fire, with food and raiment from his house.

The bed of the river Tyne being entirely altered by the flood, the Master and Brethren of the Trinity-house ordered the pilots to make a survey of the new channel, in order to qualify themselves to lay the buoys in the proper places, that ships may be conducted up and down with the usual safety.

The very remarkable preservation of one Peter Weatherly, a shoemaker, with his family, who lived upon Tyne Bridge at the time the arches fell down, seems worthy of notice: Between three and four o'clock that morning

morning he was suddenly awaked by the prodigious noise of the flood, and on opening a window, observed Mr and Mrs Fiddas, two children, and their maid passing along the bridge; on shutting the window again, he was about repairing to rest, when all on a sudden the arch immediately adjoining his house on the north side, rushed down. This instantly drew his attention to the family's safety; and raising them up, he opened the door, when he beheld the destructive torrent rolling almost immediately beneath him. He then with difficulty quitted the house, and at the utmost hazard of his life (the pavement breaking and tumbling beneath his feet into the water) assisted his wife, two young children, and a servant girl to follow him. As all access to the north was cut off by the falling of the above arch, they immediately hastened to the south end, but had not gone far until they perceived themselves involved in still greater misery and danger, two other arches having likewise fallen at that part. In this distressful situation they remained from four 'till ten o'clock in the morning, perishing with cold, and affording a most melancholy spectacle to the inhabitants on each side of the water. Their station was upon a surface about six feet square, all other parts of the arch which supported them appearing terribly rent, and threatened each moment to bury them in the flood. None durst attempt to relieve them by boats, and no other human means appeared possible.—However, a bricklayer in Gateshead concerted a measure for their deliverance, tho' the most perilous that can be conceived, and boldly ventured alone to execute it: A range of shops then standing on the east side of the bridge, supported only by timber laid from pier to pier, and extending from Gateshead to the place where the distressed people stood, afforded him the means of preserving their lives: He broke a large hole through the side of every shop, all the way to the arch where they were, and through these openings brought the whole family safe into Gateshead.

The flood in the river Wear was nearly as violent as in the Tyne; the water at Durham was full eight feet higher than ever known before; two houses, with all the furniture, were entirely swept away; the new bridge, and one of the abby mills, shared the same fate; some other houses fell down, and many were greatly damaged; several horses and cows were drowned in the stables, byers, &c. Mr Bambrough, Mr Weller, and Mr Starforth, all suffered very greatly; indeed all the inhabitants

in the lower parts of the two Elvets, suffered much. Happily, no lives were lost there; but two of Mr Carr's servants, of Cocken, perished in crossing the river at Cocken ford. The back-buildings, garden walls, &c. near the river, afford a most ruinous prospect. Frosterly, Wolfingham, and Witton bridges are all gone.—By the rapidity of the current in the Wear, about 200 keels, loaden and light, broke adrift, and many of them were carried to sea; 26 of them were stopped at the mouth of the harbour by a strong easterly wind. Several ships at Sunderland drove from their anchors, and by running against each other broke down their masts, bowsprits, cabin windows, and quarters; four or five of them were driven to sea, and totally lost. Eight or nine dead bodies came ashore that morning in the harbour.

At Barrardcastle the water was so high, that the arch on the Yorkshire side of the bridge there could not admit the quantity, so forced its way over the battlement, and a great part of it took its course along the street on the Yorkshire side, drove away the causeway, washed the soil down to the rock, and demolished eight dwelling-houses, most of them of considerable value. Some of them were entirely swept away, not one stone being left; and as the bridge-end was about four yards higher than the rock, people going into Yorkshire were obliged to go down a ladder. There were no lives lost, tho' many were in the greatest danger. Great damage was also done to the mills in that neighbourhood, and numbers of cattle were drowned. Gilmonby, Rutherford, and Greata bridges were broken down.

The water at Chester-le-street extended near 200 yards, from north to south in the street, and did considerable damage to the dwelling-houses and shops there.—The mill with most of the mill-houses and furniture, belonging to John Ethrington, near Cocken, were carried away; as were also all the corn-stacks belonging to Mr Mowbrays, at Newbrough, the fishing-lodge, and most of the furniture of Lumley boat-house. The collieries at North Eiddick, Chatterhaugh, Low Lambton, on the Wear, were all filled with water, and upwards of thirty horses in the several workings drowned. Several houses with waggons, and a great quantity of coals were swept off; and the fire engines belonging to the two former collieries entirely destroyed. All the low grounds from Chester to Cocken were covered with the dead car-

cases

cases of horses, cows, oxen, and sheep, and also with corn and hay-stacks, household furniture, and wood of all kinds.

As soon as the flood was discovered at Stockton, carriages were procured to take two boats over land to Yarm, with some experienced sailors, who thereby saved the lives of many. Thirty or forty people were taken from the tops of the houses; eight or nine lost their lives; fourteen houses were entirely thrown down; all the houses near the bridge, on both sides, are so rent as not to be habitable, so that the town must be re-built. There was fifteen feet plumb water in the street, which is five feet higher than was ever remembered. The gentlemen of Stockton contributed to send them a supply of all the necessaries of life, and set forward a subscription for their future benefit. At Croft, in Yorkshire, the town was mostly under water; part of the church was washed away, but the bridge was left standing, and we do not hear of any lives being lost.

At Kendal, in Westmorland, they had constant heavy rains for three days and three nights. Great damages were done, and many dreadful misfortunes happened;—one of which was, three men standing upon Wennington bridge, looking at something coming down the river, the bridge fell in, and they all perished. One of the men was drowned within sight of his wife and family, being just before his own door.

Several houses and estates suffered considerably in the neighbourhood of Hexham, tho' happily no lives were lost there. A man at the west boat saved himself and family by breaking through the thatch of his house, on the top of which they were obliged to continue many hours in a half naked condition. The estates of Mr Dunn, with his corn stacks, have suffered greatly; and in part of the 'Spital, belonging to Mr Westall, a large square stone is discovered, seemingly the base of a pedestal or cross.—The farms of Mr Rt Bell, and Mr Harbottle, with their cattle, are much destroyed, as are also some other grounds belonging to Sir Walter Blackett; the water course to the mills is entirely diverted.

On Saturday night the 16th, the great Solway or Solon Moss (which is upon a high ground between the Sark and the Esk, is near 1500 acres, and lies on the borders about ten miles north of Carlisle) burst on the north-east side, by a gullet of about 100 yards wide. At a very short distance from the mouth of the gullet it spread at the

breadth of almost a mile square, over above 400 acres of the best land in the North of England, and lay from 12 to 13 feet deep. It flowed out of the gullet in a very rapid current, carrying along with it a very large quantity of moss, which it forced from below the surface, and even in some places the solid surface along with it, which, by floating upon the moss that had covered the lands in the beds of Esk, gave them altogether the appearance of having been a moss from time immemorial. There are 39 families entirely driven from their habitations, and distressed by this accident. The Rev. Mr Graham, the proprietor of the lands over which the moss has covered, must be the principal sufferer. The eaves of the houses, which stood upon those lands, are just visible, the rest of them are buried in the mire. Hedges and ditches are levelled, and the whole forms a view of black moss, which before was divided into as fine green fields as any in the kingdom. The cause of the eruption is so evident, from the situation of Solway flow, and the adjacent lands on the East, together with the former management of those who have cast their peats on Solway flow, that it is more wonderful to the person who relates this account, that the Solway flow hath stood so long, than that it hath now broke out and overflowed so great a quantity of ground upon the beds of the Esk. It will be next to impossible, ever again to clear the covered land by burning the moss, tho' it appears probable that there is a possibility of clearing it by water: The greatest part of the surface of the old moss is still whole; but it is now so much out, that tho' formerly level, the middle of it is like a large glen, between two hills declining from each other.

✂ Every one must remark with pleasure, that soon after the above catastrophe, subscriptions were set on foot in various parts of the three counties, for the immediate relief of the unhappy sufferers; and that how much soever we may unhappily be divided amongst one another in religious or political sentiments, all seemed to unite in that spirit of charity and benevolence which so remarkably characterizes the English nation.—The subscriptions received at the two banks in Newcastle, for the relief of the sufferers in Newcastle, and the counties of Northumberland and Durham (besides very liberal contributions made and lodged in the hands of some gentlemen at Durham and Gateshead) amounted to about 3086l. 10s.

F I N I S

The Rev Isaac Garner Curate of Eggleston preached a Sermon on the Occasion of this Great Flood this Account of it is probably wrote by him. as it was saved together with it.



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